



## ***AOT in Action***

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

### **A Message from Director Sherry Henry:**

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Good afternoon,

We are thrilled to announce that AOT's **2012 Arizona Official State Visitor's Guide** (OSVG) is now available to consumers! As one of our most requested visitor resources, the OSVG and the accompanying Map, offer visitors valuable traveler information to plan out their next trip to the Grand Canyon State.

Tourism is a key economic driver for the state of Arizona. The OSVG is a vital fulfillment tool that encourages travel activity throughout the state increasing the economic impact of this dynamic industry to the benefit of all Arizonans.

For complete details, please read the **AOT News** section below.

Have a great week!

Sherry Henry  
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

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### **AOT News**

#### **Arizona's Leading Visitor Resource Now Available!**

Abundant with valuable Arizona tourist information from traveling tips to statewide accommodations, the Arizona Office of Tourism has now released its **2012 Arizona Official State Visitor's Guide** (OSVG), along with the accompanying **Official State Visitor's Map**.

Within the 100-page OSVG are articles written by Arizona-based writers on the vibrant variety of tourist destinations located throughout the Grand Canyon State. These articles celebrate

Arizona's great tourism assets including scenic road trips, family-fun adventures, local cuisine, outdoor experiences, Arizona's American Indian heritage and Wild West history. In addition to the informative articles, the guide features images of Arizona's signature scenery— the majestic beauty of the Grand Canyon National Park, the inspiring views of the Sonoran Desert, and the breathtaking scenes of the state's mountain vistas and lakes—that millions of visitors from around the world travel to see.

Complimentary copies of the guides and maps will be distributed in response to the agency's consumer advertising campaigns, inquiries into the Arizona travel call center as well as to travel industry partners and visitor information centers located throughout the state. >> **Read Full Article**

### **Arizona Represented at Go West Summit**

AOT attended the Go West Summit in Las Vegas, Nevada from February 5 – 8. Go West Summit is a regional travel trade show selling the American West. It brings together international tour operators with destinations and suppliers who offer travel product in the Western United States. There were approximately 125 operators from Europe, Latin America and Asia, US based receptive operators as well as some travel media. The three day event comprised of seminars and guest speakers, along with two days of pre-scheduled 12 minute appointments with tour operators to review both their current and potential Arizona product. For more information or a copy of the report, please contact Jennifer Sutcliffe at 602-364-3693 or via email at [jsutcliffe@azot.gov](mailto:jsutcliffe@azot.gov).

### **SAVE the DATE: Governor's Conference on Tourism, July 11-13, 2012**

The Arizona Governor's Conference on Tourism provides valuable networking opportunities, professional development sessions, nationally recognized speakers, a dedicated sponsor exhibit area and the Governor's Tourism Awards Dinner/Gala. The conference, which will be held at the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix, is consistently attended by more than 500 Arizona tourism industry professionals. It is one of our industry's most significant opportunities to attain information on the latest trends affecting tourism. Look toward future editions of AOT in Action for registration information.

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## **Upcoming Events & Activities**

### **[Authentic Arizona Southwest: Real Deal Ranches and the Rest Press Trip](#)**

Date: February 27 – March 3

Location: Tubac, Sonoita, Elgin, Patagonia, Nogales and Sasabe

### **[AZAP FAM Tour](#)**

Date: April 10-15

Location: TBA

### **[New York Media Mission](#)**

Date: April 16 – 20, 2012

Location: New York City, NY

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## Industry News

### **U.S. Ambassador to China Announces Plan to Speed Visa Processing**

Gary Locke, the U.S. ambassador to China, has announced efforts to increase the number of visas processed, reduce wait times and a pilot program to waive interviews for some nonimmigrant applicants in the People's Republic of China.

The [U.S. Travel Association](#) praised the announcement; the latest in a series of efforts to make it easier for international travelers to visit the U.S. Increased U.S. travel could be a major boost to the U.S. economy. In 2011, more than 1 million visa applications were processed in China, an increase of 34 percent over 2010. To date in 2012, visa processing is up 48 percent compared to the same period in 2011. Additionally, wait times for interviews have decreased dramatically, with current wait times at all posts in China at less than six days.

Also, a new worldwide pilot program is being launched in China that permits consular officers to waive interviews for some nonimmigrant applicants. This applies only to those renewing their visa within 48 months of the expiration of their previous visa, and it must be within the same classification. The U.S. State Department reports that this effort could free up an additional 100,000 interview slots for new applicants. On Jan. 19, President Obama announced a national strategy on travel and tourism to increase travel to the United States. (*Travel Pulse, February 13*)

### **Consumer Confidence Still Volatile**

While many of the economic stats seem to be improving and President Obama, during his January State of the Union address, indicated that "the state of our Union is getting stronger," consumers remain unconvinced. Only 18 percent of Americans told Gallup pollsters that they are satisfied with the way things are going in the country, far worse than the historical average for this measure. Just 13 percent think economic conditions are excellent or good; 87% say they are only fair or poor. The majority believes the economy is getting worse, not better. On the positive note, these findings are at least modestly better than a few months ago.

The latest [Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index](#) report also saw declines in consumer optimism. After reaching an eight-month high in December, the index dropped to 61.1 from an upwardly revised 64.8 the month before, much more negative than anticipated.

But other surveys show more positive results. The [Bloomberg Consumer Comfort Index](#) rose to minus 44.8 in the period ending January 29, up from minus 46.4 the previous week. Nevertheless, 41 percent of survey respondents continued to believe that the economy is in "poor" shape, although this is the smallest share since March.

The [Thomson/Reuters University of Michigan Index](#) also rose to an almost one-year high of 75.0 in January, increasing from 69.9 in December and slightly better than last January. This marked the fifth consecutive month that the Sentiment Index increased from its August low of 55.8. But, it remains below last year's peak of 77.5 in the February 2011 survey. Although twice as many

anticipated an improved near-term economic outlook compared with five months ago, consumers were unlikely to expect their financial situation to improve. Moreover, confidence in government policies remains near an all-time low. (*U.S. Travel.org, February*)

### **U.S. Commerce Department Reports Record Year for Travel Exports**

The latest U.S. Department of Commerce figures show that 2011 was a record year for travel exports, according to David Huether, senior vice president of economics and research at the U.S. Travel Association. The travel industry generated \$152.4 billion in exports last year, up from \$134.4 billion in 2010, according to the just-released December international trade report from the Commerce Department.

Following an 11.7 percent gain in 2010, travel exports grew last year by 13.4 percent -- the fastest pace in three years. As a result, 2011 travel exports surpassed the previous peak set in 2008 by \$11 billion and helped the industry post a record trade surplus of \$41.9 billion.

U.S. travel exports ended 2011 on a high note, with exports rising by \$121 million from November to \$12.9 billion in December. With travel exports accounting for 10 percent of the December rise, total exports of goods and services increased \$1.2 billion in December, while imports rose to a stronger \$3 billion, resulting in a monthly trade deficit of \$48.8 billion -- the highest since June.

"With travel exports eclipsing the exports of both machinery and computer products, as well as agriculture sales abroad, the positive impact of international travelers visiting the United States has been one of the key reasons why the travel industry has reclaimed nearly 50 percent of the jobs lost during the great recession -- much better than the rest of the economy," said Huether. (*Travel Pulse, February 13*)

### **STR Reports Decline in U.S. Hotel Pipeline for January**

The total active U.S. hotel development pipeline comprises 2,736 projects totaling 293,143 rooms, according to the January 2012 STR/McGraw Hill Construction Dodge Pipeline Report released this week. This represents a 1.6 percent decrease in the number of rooms in the total active pipeline compared to January 2011.

The total active pipeline data includes projects in the In Construction, Final Planning and Planning stages, but does not include projects in the Pre-Planning stage. The U.S. hotel industry reported an increase in rooms under construction (up 3.4 percent with 52,425 rooms), compared with January 2011.

Among the Chain Scale segments, the Upper Upscale segment reported the largest increase in rooms in the total active pipeline, rising 34.1 percent to 19,786 rooms, followed by the Economy segment (up 29.7 percent to 4,507 rooms), and the Upscale segment (up 12.6 percent to 74,267 rooms). The Unaffiliated segment reported the most rooms in the total active pipeline with 83,297 rooms.

Three segments ended the month with increases in the number of rooms under construction -- the Luxury segment (up 45.2 percent with 819 rooms), the Upscale segment (up 40.9 percent with 16,594 rooms), and the Upper Upscale segment (up 15.5 percent with 7,622 rooms). In

conjunction with Baird, STR also recently announced a rise in the U.S. Hotel Stock Index. (*Travel Pulse, February 15*)

### **San Francisco Reports Strong Weekly Increases**

San Francisco/San Mateo, California, experienced the largest increases in all three key performance metrics during the week of 5-11 February 2012, according to data from STR.

The market's occupancy rose 17.3% to 80.9%, its average daily rate increased 40.4% to US\$205.37 and its revenue per available room jumped 64.7% to US\$166.12. The market's performance was boosted by various events, including the 2012 American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons Annual Meeting, which was held 7-11 February 2012.

Overall, the U.S. hotel industry's occupancy was up 2.6% to 55.9%, ADR increased 3.8% to US\$102.01 and RevPAR was up 6.5% to US\$57. Among the top 25 markets, Houston, Texas, was the only market, other than San Francisco/San Mateo, to report a double-digit occupancy increase, up 11% to 68.5%. Anaheim-Santa Ana, California, fell 6.2% in occupancy to 63.9%, followed by New Orleans with a 5.8% decrease to 67.9%.

Dallas was the only market to report double-digit ADR and RevPAR decreases, falling 15.4% to US\$94.25 and 17.9% to US\$56.85, respectively. Among the chain-scale segments, the independent segment rose 3.3% in occupancy to 52.4%, reporting the largest increase in that metric, followed by the upper-midscale segment with a 3.2% increase to 55.9%.

The luxury segment (+5.2% to US\$263.55) and the upper-upscale segment (+4.9% to US\$152.27) experienced the largest ADR increases for the week. The independent segment jumped 7.1% in RevPAR to US\$50.50, posting the largest increase in that metric, followed by the upper-upscale segment (+6.9% to US\$102.61) and the luxury segment (+6.6% to US\$178.19).

(*HotelNewsNow.com, February 16*)

### **Global Traveler Magazine Leisure Travel Awards Nominations**

*Global Traveler* is thrilled to announce its 1st GT Leisure Travel Awards program. *Global Traveler* is collecting destination information to be included in a voting ballot sent to its readers. The ballot will be released in the magazine's annual Luxury Bonus Book, distributed with the May 2012 issue of *Global Traveler*. The magazine's distinguished reader audience of frequent, luxury travelers will cast their votes for the best of the best in Leisure Travel. Polls close December 31st 2012. To have your destination be considered for the ballot, visit <http://globaltravelerusa.com/leisureawards>.

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### **Calendar of Events**

Visit [www.ArizonaGuide.com](http://www.ArizonaGuide.com) to find information on all the exciting [events, festivals and activities](#) held throughout the Grand Canyon State!

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